



# FACTS *About...*



HEALTH DEPARTMENT



## Hepatitis A

### What is it?

Hepatitis A virus (HAV) cause liver infection. Symptoms usually develop quickly, last 1-2 weeks, and include fever, malaise, fatigue, muscle ache, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting and abdominal cramps. Jaundice may occur after a few days. Jaundice is a condition where the skin and the whites of the eyes turn yellow. Body fluids such as urine may also darken. Symptoms of HAV start within 15-50 days, usually 28-30 days after being infected with the virus.

Symptoms may be very mild and can last for weeks or even months. Some people with HAV get no symptoms at all. HAV infection in children under 6 years of age are often only recognized by laboratory tests.

HAV is a disease of public health significance and must be reported to the Health Department.

### How is it spread?

HAV virus is spread person to person through the fecal-oral route. The virus is found in the feces of an infected person, with the highest level of virus in the feces in the 2 weeks prior to jaundice. This is the period of the greatest likelihood of spread. The virus is usually spread by eating or drinking food, water or beverages contaminated with the feces. Failure to wash hands properly after using the washroom or changing diapers will allow the virus to spread from person to person. Transmission from mother to newborn infant is rare. In recent years, contaminated produce such as green onions, blueberries, frozen strawberries, sun-dried tomatoes, salad and lettuce, along with oysters and orange juice, have been associated with community-wide outbreaks.

### What do I look for?

Early symptoms are easily mistaken for the signs of mild flu-like illness. Common symptoms include fever, diarrhea, fatigue, loss of appetite, and abdominal cramps followed by jaundice. Dark urine and light-coloured stools, and itching may occur.

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For more information

Durham Region Health Department

905-668-2020 1-800-841-2729 durham.ca

If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.

Hepatitis A can be  
prevented by a  
vaccine

Most adults experience these symptoms approximately 28 days after being infected with the disease. Only a small percentage of adults do not show any signs at all. In comparison, most children with HAV do not show symptoms, making it easy for children to transmit the HAV to others.

## How is it treated?

There is no specific treatment for HAV. Family members and close contacts can receive injections of immune globulin to boost their resistance to the infection. Vaccine against HAV is available for people who are concerned or at risk of infection. Once you have become infected with HAV, you are protected from further infection for life.

## How can I protect myself?

- Wash your hands well, with warm running water and soap, rubbing together for at least 15 seconds, after using the washroom, changing diapers, before eating and preparing foods.
- Food handlers, child care centre staff and health care providers must be excluded from work for 14 days after onset of symptoms, or excluded from work for 7 days after onset of jaundice whichever comes earlier.
- Children and persons providing care to others should be educated about when and how to practice proper hand hygiene.
- In child care centres, strict cleanliness and personal hygiene must be followed. Frequently touched surfaces including toys should be cleaned and disinfected often. Kitchen surfaces must also be washed and sanitized often.
- Persons working with non-human primates, particularly chimpanzees, should pay special attention to personal hygiene and cleanliness. Consult with your physician to find out if you should be immunized against HAV.
- Travellers to countries with high rates of HAV should be vaccinated before travelling.
- Practice safer sex including avoiding anal-oral contact with your sexual partner(s).
- People with hepatitis B or C infection should be vaccinated to prevent further damage to the liver.

## More information can be obtained from

Durham Health Connection Line  
905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729

August 23, 2018

For more information

Durham Region Health Department

905-66**8-2020** 1-800-841-2729 durham.ca

If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.